

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Sweetwater Marsh National Wildlife Refuge South San Diego Bay Unit of the San Diego National Wildlife Refuge

October 2001 - Planning Update 2

SINCE THE LAST PLANNING UPDATE

Much has occurred since the last planning update was issued in June 2000. As you know from the notices we have been sending out, we have spent much of the last year conducting public workshops to address a number of topics related to the Comprehensive Conservation Plan. Topics of discussion have included goals and objectives, restoration planning and public use. A summary of each of these topics is provided in this planning update.

In the Update:

Progress To Date	1
Mission Statement	2
Draft Refuge Goals	2
Refuge Purposes	3
Restoration Planning	3
Public Use Update	3
Website Information	3
Contact Information	4

CCP Schedule

The draft CCP/EIS is expected to be available for public review in late winter 2001/2002.



PROGRESS TO DATE

Over the past fifteen months, considerable progress has been made in developing a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the Sweetwater Marsh and South San Diego Bay Refuges. Since our last planning update, the planning team has held two public scoping workshops in the South Bay and solicited written comments from interested agencies, organizations, and individuals.

The initial workshops were well attended, with more than 60 people present to provide their input. From the comments received, a broad list of issues and opportunities were identified.

Because public interest in the CCP was so high during the initial scoping process, the project team decided to hold additional focused workshops. Five workshops have been held to date and all have been well attended, averaging over 40 participants per meeting. These workshops focused on refuge goals and objectives, options for habitat restoration, public use, and refuge management.

The discussions at these workshops have been very constructive, and have generated comments that represent a wide range of interests and opinions. The project team thanks all those who have participated.

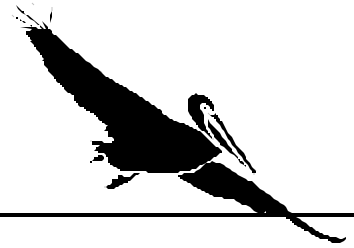
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM MISSION STATEMENT

“To administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and, where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

DEVELOPING REFUGE GOALS

One of the first steps in the CCP process was to develop draft goals and objectives for the two refuges. Several factors were considered when drafting these goals and objectives, including the interim goals that were prepared at the time the refuges were created, the mission of the refuge system, and the purpose for which each refuge was established (see page 3).

Further, the project team wanted to be certain that the draft goals would reflect the desired future conditions for these refuges, as defined by the project team and the members of the public who participated in the scoping process. The draft goals for each refuge are presented below.



Draft Refuge Goals for the Sweetwater Marsh NWR

- Protect, enhance, restore, and manage coastal wetland and upland habitats to benefit native fish, wildlife and plant species.
- Protect, enhance, and manage populations of endangered and threatened species and other species of concern, with special emphasis on California Least Tern, Western Snowy Plover, Light-footed Clapper Rail and salt marsh bird's beak, through habitat restoration and population management.
- Protect and restore the environmental health of the Refuge's coastal salt marsh and upland habitats by making contaminants remediation a priority for the Refuge and adjacent properties.
- Provide outstanding environmental education and interpretive programs for all ages in partnership with the Chula Vista Nature Center and create additional partnerships with other public agencies and non-governmental organizations to expand, improve and deliver information to the public about a wide array of natural resource issues.
- Provide opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreational uses that are compatible with refuge purposes and foster a broader understanding of the value of, and need for, wildlife conservation.

Draft Refuge Goals for the South San Diego Bay Unit of the San Diego NWR

- Protect, enhance, restore, and manage wetland and upland habitats to support native fish, wildlife and plant species.
- Protect, enhance, and manage populations of endangered and threatened species and other species of concern through habitat restoration and population management, with special emphasis on California Least Tern, Western Snowy Plover, Light-footed Clapper Rail, California Brown Pelican and salt marsh bird's beak.
- Provide high quality foraging, resting, and breeding habitat for colonial nesting seabirds and nesting shorebirds, waterfowl and salt marsh dependent species, such as Belding's Savannah Sparrow.
- Provide high quality wintering habitat to benefit migratory shorebirds and water birds.
- Provide opportunities for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational uses that foster public appreciation of the unique natural heritage of South San Diego Bay.

PURPOSES FOR WHICH THESE REFUGES WERE ESTABLISHED

The Sweetwater Marsh NWR was established in 1988 for the purpose of conserving fish or wildlife which are federally listed as endangered or threatened species and for the development, advancement, management, conservation, and protection of fish and wildlife resources.



California Least Tern

The South San Diego Bay Unit was established in 1999 for the purpose of protecting, managing, and restoring habitats for federally listed endangered and threatened species and migratory birds, and to maintain and enhance the biological diversity of native plants and animals.

Visit the CCP Website

Visit the San Diego Refuges website for more information about the public uses and restoration alternatives being evaluated in the draft CCP.

<http://sandiegorefuges.fws.gov>

Once in the website, click on "What's New" and then click on "Read the Comprehensive Conservation Plan."

No internet access? Contact the CCP Planner to obtain project information (see page 4).

RESTORATION PLANNING

Restoration and enhancement of the native habitats within the South Bay refuges was an important consideration when the Sweetwater Marsh NWR and South San Diego Bay Unit were established. The Sweetwater Marsh NWR includes a number of areas identified as future mitigation sites, including portions of the D Street Fill and Gunpowder Point. The Service is also obligated to prepare "a holistic habitat restoration plan" for the salt works property under the terms of our Cooperative Agreement with the San Diego Unified Port District.

Designing restoration plans for these refuges has involved a team of Fish and Wildlife Service representatives, including staff from Refuges, Ecological Services, and the Coastal Program. The team has been evaluating a range of options for restoring and/or enhancing habitats that support the Refuges' endangered and threatened species, as well as the current diversity of fish, wildlife, and plant species found on these refuges. Three public workshops on this topic were held over the past year. We began in November 2000 by discussing general wildlife management and restoration concepts.

At our March 2000 workshop, nine conceptual restoration options for the South San Diego Bay Unit were presented. These options were also posted on our website and public comments were solicited. Based on the comments received and additional analysis by the

project team, restoration alternatives were developed. These alternatives were presented at a public workshop held in May 2001.

Comments generated from the May workshop resulted in the further refinement of several alternatives, as well as the development of a new alternative for the salt works. These revised alternatives can be viewed at the CCP website. We will continue to evaluate and refine the alternatives based on input from FWS biologists, outside experts in the field of coastal wetland restoration, and the public.



PUBLIC USE UPDATE

Guidance for authorizing public uses on National Wildlife Refuges is provided in the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act (the Act) of 1997. The Act states, "compatible wildlife-dependent recreation is a legitimate and appropriate general public use of the System . . . through which the American public can develop an appreciation for fish and wildlife."

The Act recognizes that wildlife-dependent recreational uses involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation, when determined to be compatible, are legitimate and appropriate public uses of the Refuge System that should receive priority consideration in refuge planning and management. (Continued on Page 4)

PUBLIC USE (cont.)

According to the Act, when a wildlife-dependent recreational use is determined to be a compatible use and is not inconsistent with public safety, that activity should be facilitated. The term "compatible use" is defined as a wildlife-dependent recreational use or any other use of a refuge that, in the sound professional judgment of the Refuge Manager, will not materially interfere with or detract from the fulfillment of the mission of the

System or the purposes of the refuge.

The project team presented a list of potential refuge uses for public discussion at a workshop held in June 2001. These uses, which include waterfowl hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing and interpretation, and environmental education, will be evaluated in the draft CCP. A detailed description of the public uses proposed for these refuges is provided on our CCP website.

Compatibility determinations must be prepared for all uses proposed on a refuge. Our compatibility determinations have not yet been completed and a final decision as to which of these uses will be authorized on these refuges is still pending. The completed compatibility determinations will be distributed with the draft CCP for public review and comment.



FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Victoria Touchstone, CCP Planner
Sweetwater Marsh NWR
1080 Gunpowder Point Drive, Chula Vista, CA 91910
Phone: 619-691-1185 Email: Victoria_Touchstone@fws.gov



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF INTERIOR
FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE
Sweetwater Marsh National Wildlife Refuge
1080 Gunpowder Point Drive
Chula Vista, CA 91910

First Class Mail
Postage and Fees
PAID
US Department
of the Interior
Permit G-77